

**MEDICAL CENTER ARCHIVES
OF
NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN/WEILL CORNELL**

**1300 York Avenue # 34
New York, NY 10065**

**Finding Aid To
THE GEORGE AMSDEN, MD (1870-1966) PAPERS**

**Dates of Papers:
1898-1953**

**60 Linear Inches
(12 Boxes)**

**Finding Aid Prepared By:
The Archival Staff
Undated**

Provenance

The George S. Amsden Papers were purchased by the Medical Archives in 1983 from a rare book dealer in New Hampshire, who had salvaged them from the attic and barn of a house that was being sold. Much material apparently already had been destroyed. The remaining material consists primarily of patient case histories, correspondence, and lecture and research notes from the 1910s through the 1940s.

Biographical Note

Dr. George Samuel Amsden, a member of the medical staff of Bloomingdale Hospital for the first 20 years of his career and Director of the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic (PWPC) of The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center for the first year of its existence, retained an active interest in research, as well as in treatment of psychiatric disorders, throughout his sixty year practice.

Born May 7, 1870 in Ashtabula, Ohio, Dr. Amsden attended Phillips Exeter Academy and Harvard College, graduating from the former in 1892 and the latter in 1901. He went on to Harvard Medical School and, upon receiving his M.D. degree in 1905, became an assistant physician at Bloomingdale Hospital in White Plains, New York, then the only psychiatric service of The New York Hospital (NYH). He had, at some earlier date, been associated with McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, possibly during his years at Harvard Medical School. While working closely with such renowned psychiatrists of the day as Drs. August Hoch and William L. Russell, his early research was in the treatment of paresis and the study of the personality. In 1909-1910, Dr. Amsden traveled to Munich and Zurich for post-graduate work. He studied the work of several European clinics in the diagnosis and treatment of syphilis. Upon his return, he introduced the Wasserman test to Bloomingdale Hospital and New York Hospital. Although his work on paresis apparently ended after a few years, his work on the personality, which focused on the relationship between certain character traits and various psychoses and neuroses, would continue throughout his life.

Dr. Amsden was director of the psychological research laboratory at Bloomingdale Hospital from 1907-1914. He eventually became Senior Physician and Director of the Men's Department there, leaving in 1924 to become a Professor of Clinical Psychology at Albany Medical College and Director of the Psychopathology Department at Albany Hospital. He remained involved in the teaching of psychiatry and training of psychiatrists through the late 1930s.

In addition to teaching medical students at Albany, and later at Cornell University Medical College, in the 1930s, Dr. Amsden trained psychiatric residents at PWPC. As a member of the Education Committee of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, he arranged for training of prospective psychoanalysts

and continuing education of practicing psychoanalysts. He also taught at the New York Post-Graduate Medical School at Columbia University after leaving Albany in 1928. He maintained an appointment there as Professor of Psychiatry, taking some time to study in Europe from 1928-1930, until 1931 when he was appointed Professor of Psychiatry at Cornell University Medical College and Director and Psychiatrist-in-Chief of the new PWPC which opened in October, 1932 in New York City.

Dr. Amsden stepped down as PWPC Director in 1933 but continued as Psychiatrist-in-Chief and as a professor at the medical school through 1935. He then devoted himself exclusively to his private practice, first briefly in Manhattan and then, from 1938-1964, in Acworth, New Hampshire. Dr. Amsden had apparently maintained a private practice to some extent from the beginning of his career on. He kept up personal friendships with several of his patients and their families, as is revealed in much of the correspondence in these papers.

His professional affiliations, in addition to the New York Psychoanalytic Society, included the Association for the Research of Nervous and Mental Diseases, the Eugenics Research Association, the New York Academy of Medicine, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychopathological Association and the American Medical Association.

Dr. Amsden's first wife, Medora, died in 1949. Medora Amsden had been involved in directing an early program at Bloomingdale Hospital, established in 1908, to teach female patients weaving and basketry, which were considered both practical training and "moral" therapy. Dr. Amsden died on November 27, 1966, in New Hampshire, survived by his second wife, Virginia, stepchildren George Broadwell and Mrs. Dare Schumacher, and foster son Julius Halasz (Jay Halas). He apparently had no children of his own. A sister, Mrs. Sawyer, had died in 1949.

Unfortunately, the whole of Amsden's life cannot be reconstructed from these papers, nor from the sparse biographical material found in *American Men of Science*, obituaries from *The New York Times* and *Medical World News*, records of NYH, and *The New York Hospital: A History of the Psychiatric Service* by William L. Russell.

Scope and Content Note

The George S. Amsden Papers include the following series: (A) Amsden's Professional Education; (B) Notes, Studies, Papers; (C) General Correspondence; (D) Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic (PWPC) of The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center; (E) New York Psychoanalytic Society and Other Professional Organizations (F) Case Histories and Other Patient Records; and (G) Correspondence with and re: Patients.

The case histories and other patient records, the largest single series, include diagnosis and treatment notes and summaries. Almost all concern patients admitted to Bloomingdale Hospital (1905-1924) or Albany Hospital (1924-1927), but a few concern patients from Dr. Amsden's private practice. Two noteworthy parts of these records are a set of autopsy reports on Bloomingdale patients (1905-1914) and several case histories of servicemen admitted during and immediately after World War I (marked "Military" on the Bloomingdale forms). The records in general provide information about the practice of psychiatry at the time, descriptions of disorders treated, a profile of the patient population, a view of hospital procedures, and insight into Dr. Amsden's own methodology. The series includes notes for a couple of patients on Wagner Medical Records, oversized charts apparently for nurses' records.

Dr. Amsden carried on a substantial correspondence with several patients and received letters over the years from many, many others. The letters in the collection, mostly those received (rather than copies of those sent) reveal that he saw patients socially and became friend and advisor not only to many former patients but also to members of their families. Few letters can be found from Dr. Amsden's early years of practice; the bulk of the letters are from the 1940s. The correspondence includes letters from patients during, after, or both during and after their course of treatment with Dr. Amsden. The people who wrote most extensively tended to suffer either from manic-depression psychosis or dementia praecox (schizophrenia), and their letters provide much testimony as to their symptoms.

The rest of the correspondence in the collection is largely from other doctors, mostly during Dr. Amsden's Bloomingdale tenure. Notable names include Drs. August Hoch, C. Macfie Campbell, G. H. Kirby, Hideyo Noguchi and William L. Russell. The correspondence with Dr. Noguchi involved an interesting instance of the spread of misinformation: Drs. Noguchi and Amsden traced a path of communication regarding a published statement by another physician incorrectly reporting a risk of infection in certain treatments for syphilis.

Information regarding psychiatric training of hospital residents came from physicians such as Drs. Adolph Meyer and G. Canby Robinson; this is included in the PWPC series. The PWPC material breaks down into two general categories: Material relating to the educational program of the new clinic, and that relating to the budget. The latter includes proposed fee schedules as well as proposed expenditures. Drafts of salary and work schedules include names of nursing and house staff, perhaps the most famous of which is Dr. Benjamin Spock. Virtually all this material concerns planning for PWPC, thus, Dr. Amsden's administrative and teaching activities as Psychiatrist-in-Chief are poorly documented. Not at all documented is Dr. Amsden's transition during the mid-1930s from institutional practice and teaching to private practice.

The Professional Education series comprise the earliest papers in the collection, beginning in 1900-1901. No material exists from Dr. Amsden's college years, or explains how he came to attend college and medical school in his late 20s and early 30s rather than a decade earlier.

Two other important informational gaps in the papers concern Dr. Amsden's family, about which the material reveals extremely little, and his last 15 years of practice, as the most recent significant material is from 1949. The little information revealed about Dr. Amsden's personal life is contained in extensive correspondence with his foster son, Julius Halasz. These letters, mostly from the late 1940s, are in General Correspondence. Dr. Amsden's relationship with Julius appears to have been quite close and caring.

The series Notes, Studies and Papers is to some extent the least complete, most miscellaneous of the collection. It includes many drafts of studies for two pamphlets, published by Bloomingdale Hospital for a professional readership, both written by Dr. Amsden: "A Guide to the Descriptive Study of the Personality" (1924, 1952), and "A Report of the Intra-Spinal Treatment of General Paralysis" (1915). There are also notes for lectures to students or fellow doctors and notes on work done by others. But notes for other research and teaching endeavors must surely have existed and are now lost. In addition, the context and exact date of much material here is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain. This miscellaneous nature of the notes may not enable an accurate or comprehensive understanding of Dr. Amsden's research methods or teaching philosophy.

Patients' names are revealed in all the series except the New York Psychoanalytic Society and Professional Education material. Identification of patients by researchers using the collection is not permitted, and research in patients' medical records is restricted to longitudinal studies. [These records are protected under the federal HIPAA Privacy Rule.]

Non-manuscript Materials were removed from the boxes and are located elsewhere due to size or format:

Photographs enclosed with letters from series C and G, now located in photo collection. See Image Database.

Originals of clippings enclosed with letters from series G, now in acid-free wrapping paper in separate box, end of Amsden Papers

6 folded blueprints of sections of the PWPC building, 1931, from series D, now located in map case,

2 index lists from file boxes containing names of hospitals and dates 1869-1896, now in separate file in box, end of Amsden Papers

2 oversize certificates: New York Academy of Medicine (c. 1930s) from series E and Selective Service Medal (c. 1946) from series C.

2 folders of oversize Wagner Medical Records from series F.

2 original letters with Hideyo Noguchi signatures from series C, now located in locked black cabinet in "Important Signatures" folder

Note: The papers were reduced in size from almost 90 linear inches to 60; consolidation was achieved by discarding envelopes and duplicate copies of typescripts.

Series Descriptions and Container Listing

Series A: Professional Education, 1900-05, 1910

5 inches. Box 1. Arranged chronologically by academic year

These papers are primarily notes from Dr. Amsden's studies at Harvard Medical School, especially the 1904-1905 academic year. They consist of notes from lecture and clinical courses, such as "Diagnosis" and "Clinical Medicine." Most sets of notes are not complete. Most are handwritten on loose sheets of paper, but a few are typed outlines. Two notebooks are apparently from two summers before medical school, 1900 and 1901 when Dr. Amsden traveled to Europe and one notebook and set of drawings apparently from studies in 1910 in Europe.

Box 1

- f.1 1900-1901. Europe notebook; Zoology 4 and Zoology 5 notebook (summer studies 1901)
- f.2 1903-1904. Class notes, Harvard Medical School, Diagnosis by Dr. Frederick Cheever Shattuck.
- f.3 1903-1904. Class notes, Harvard Medical School, Theory and Practice by Reginald Heber Fitz.
- f.4 1904-1905. Class notes, Harvard Medical School, Clinical Medicine by Dr. Richard Clarke Cabot.
- f.5 1904-1905. Class Notes, Harvard Medical School, Clinical Medicine by Dr. Frederick Cheever Shattuck.
- f.6 1904-1905. Class notes, Harvard Medical School, Practical Therapeutics by Dr. George Gray Sears, unmarked notes.
- f.7 1910. Notebook "Notes on Wasserman Reaction - Munich," drawings of cells (Zurich?).
- f.8 n.d. "Cortex Cells & Fibers," Standard Ammonic Chloride," "Standard Potassic Nitrate." probably lab notes.

Series B: Notes, Studies, Papers, 1898, 1906-1914, 1924-1928, 1933-1935, 1942

13 inches. Box 2, 3, Box 4, folders 1-6. Arranged by Subject

A Guide to the Descriptive Study of the Personality, c. 1908-1909: Notes and drafts for text and outline for "A Guide to the Descriptive Study of the Personality" by Dr. August Hoch and Dr. Amsden, an outline later published separately under Dr. Amsden's name alone. Includes many typed drafts of "schema," or outlines, also entitled "General Sizing Up of Case ..." Many are annotated by Dr. Amsden, sometimes with notes on named patients. Also includes some library research.

Intraspinous Treatment of Paresis, c. 1906-1914: Mostly handwritten notes and charts of treatment of Bloomingdale Hospital patients, c. 1909, which culminated in a report on intro-spinal treatments printed in 1915. Also handwritten notes on works by others on paresis. Small amount of correspondence and typed drafts of the intra-spinal treatment report, of which there are two Bloomingdale printed pamphlets. See also Case Histories series for more material on some of the patients whose treatments are described here.

Teaching Notes, 1924-1928, 1933-1935: Notes and outlines for teaching of third and fourth year medical students at Albany Medical College, 1924-1928, and Cornell University Medical College, 1933-1935. Cornell material includes several original Bloomingdale Hospital case histories, which are accompanied by notes specifically referring to them. A few typed sets of lectures notes are clearly for an assembly of students. Most notes are handwritten. Includes several class schedules for the students.

Notes for lectures apparently given to groups of doctors, psychiatrists, teachers (as opposed to medical students or residents). Several typescripts of translations of German reports; summaries of other researchers' work. Miscellaneous Bloomingdale Hospital material and personal notes.

Box 2

- f.1 "A Guide to the Descriptive Study of the Personality" by Hoch & Amsden: handwritten notes and typed drafts c. 1908, Bloomingdale Press prints, 1924, 1952
- f.2 "A Guide to the Descriptive Study of the Personality": background notes, outlines, charts, patient notations, bibliographic notes, c. 1908-1909
- f.3 "Intraspinous Treatment of Paresis" by Amsden: notes and correspondence re treatment of patients, 1913-1914
- f.4 "Intraspinous Treatment of Paresis": 1915 print, notes on works by others, patient treatment charts, c. 1913-1914
- f.5 Teaching Notes: 4th year class, Cornell University Medical College (CUMC) 1934, notes and case histories, c. 1908-1912

Box 3

- f.1 Teaching Notes: 3rd and 4th year classes, CUMC, 1933-1935, notes and case histories, 1906-1934
- f.2 Teaching notes: sets of topical outlines, 1924-1934
- f.3 Teaching Notes: "Psychobiology" course lectures, 1st year class, CUMC 1935
- f.4 Teaching Notes: "Psychobiology," apparent later draft 1935
- f.5 Drafts of Amsden lectures to other doctors, c. 1909-10, 1920, re: psychiatry, psychology, mental hygiene, aphasia, human conduct, personality, and manic depression

Box 4

- f.1 Typescripts, c. 1910-1920, "Manic Depressive Psychoses," "The Test Apparatus," "Infectious Psychoses-Studies at Breslau."
- f.2 Notes on: aphasia and apraxia studies done by others, on Nissl's manuscript on the Brain Cortex, c. 1910-1920; reprint of "The Ganser Symptom" by Townsend, 1909; translation of "Ninth Report about the German Research Institute for Psychiatry," 1929
- f.3 Letters and drafts for Radio Talk, "Personality Difficulties," 1942
- f.4 Essay by Dr., Amsden on the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution regarding Prohibition, c. 1919
- f.5 Bloomingdale Material: Attendants Rules 1898; sample test forms c. 1905-1920

Series C: General Correspondence, 1909-2922, 1929, 1932, 1936, 1946-1949
2 inches. Box 4, folders 7-9. Arranged alphabetically by sender.

Includes: letters from other physicians regarding professional conferences, papers, etc.; letters of Dr. Amsden's attorney regarding Mrs. Amsden's trolley accident in 1913; letters from lawyers and others regarding patients' estates, or from their conservators; letters from chemists; letters from Exeter classmates; lengthy correspondence in late 1940s with the Amsdens' foster son, Julius Halasz. The bulk is from other doctors, mostly from 1910s. Note that correspondence relating to planning of PWPC (1924-1932) is in Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic series, and that relating to meetings of the New York Psychoanalytic Society in the New York Psychoanalytic Society series. A small amount of correspondence from other doctors can be found with case histories or patient correspondence, as those letters dealt exclusively with treatment or diagnosis of cases on which there were files in those record series.

Box 4

- f.7 A through M
- f.8 N through W (photos, oversize certificate removed)

f.9 Julius Halasz (foster son), 1922, 1929, 1946-1949

Series D: Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of The New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, 1924-1933. 3 inches plus. Box 5, folders 1-4 plus blueprints in Map Case. Arranged by subject (budget or educational planning).

Includes: correspondence regarding planning of PWPC, 1924-1932; budget drafts, 1932-1933; comparisons of Bloomingdale Hospital and PWPC departments in extensive notes, letters, samples exchanged by Drs. William L. Russell and Amsden; correspondence among Drs. Stanley Cobb, G. Canby Robinson, Adolph Meyer, Sidney Schwab, William Russell and Amsden regarding training programs and the teaching of psychiatry in general. Budget estimates, many of which are loose, notes by Dr. Amsden, are numerous. Schedules for the nursing department are provided in some detail. Many drafts of typed schedules, income, fees and expenditure statements are included, a few of which were drawn up by others for Dr. Amsden's use in drawing up clinic-wide budgets.

Box 5

- f.1 Papers of information from Dr. W. L. Russell, typescripts, reprints, outlines, letters re: psychiatric training in hospitals & medical schools, 1924-1930
- f.2 planning material: correspondence among doctors re: teaching programs in psychiatry, 1927-1931
- f.3 budget drafts and related material: notes, letters, schedules, 1931-1933
- f.4 budget drafts and related material: minutes, notes, nurses' schedules, letters, 1932-1933

6 blueprints of hospital building 1931 removed to Map Case

Series E: New York Psychoanalytic Society and Other Professional Associations, 1932-1940, 1944, 1953 2 inches plus 1 oversize folder. Box 5, folders 5-7. Unarranged, except correspondence in chronological order.

Correspondence, reports, brochures of course offerings at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute (the training and continuing education arm of the Society). Meeting notices and correspondence about monthly general meetings and committee meetings. Some letters and notes concerning prospective trainees in psychoanalysis. Small amounts of material from related professional organizations, the Internationalen Psychoanalytischer Verlag and the American Psychiatric Association.

Box 5

- f.5 New York Psychoanalytic Society: correspondence, meeting notices, lists and notes; bulletins from Emergency Committee on Relief & Immigration, 1938
- f.6 New York Psychoanalytic Society: course offerings, etc., from Training Division, Educational Committee, Extension Division and Professional School, 1935-1940.
- f.7 Material from Internationalen Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1934, 1936; by-laws of American Psychiatric Association 1937; stationery New York Psychiatric Society

New York Academy of Medicine Certificate, removed to Map Case

Series F: Case Histories and Other Patient Records. 1904-1927, 1934, 1939 1941. 21 inches plus 2 oversize folders. Box 6-Box 8,9 f.1-2, Box 12. Arranged alphabetically by patient surname, or if bound, by original label, usually diagnoses.

Boxes 8-11 are lists of names of patients and therefore confidential. Box 8 and part of 9 are case histories. The rest of Box 9 through 11 contain correspondence with patient names.

Records include:

1. Formal case histories documenting family history, personal history, traits, mental status, neurological status, analysis, summary, interview transcript and/or samples of patient talk. These may be handwritten by Dr. Amsden or may be typed on Bloomingdale or Albany Hospital forms. They vary in length from 2 pages to over 100. Some dating generally from the late 1910s to early 1920s, are bound together in series of diagnoses of Bloomingdale Hospital patients. Bulk of formal histories is from 1910s.
2. Informal notations. Usually handwritten by Dr. Amsden, a few typed. Usually no more than a few pages long. Most from 1920s, 1941.
3. Medical, as opposed to psychiatric records, on hospital forms; only a few, from early 1910s.
4. Autopsy notes, handwritten by Dr. Amsden or typed, brief notes on autopsies performed at Bloomingdale Hospital, 1905-1914.

Notes in patient records have occasionally been made by doctors other than Dr. Amsden. Some records are in the form of correspondence, kept in this series rather than with other patient correspondence because they are exclusively medical histories sent to Dr. Amsden in the form of letters. Records also occasionally contain notes by and letters from patients themselves. More

material on some patients may be found in Notes, Studies, and Papers – Intraspinous Treatment of Paresis.

Box 6

- f.1 Autopsy Reports, 1905-1914
- f.2 Constitutional deviations cases 1911-1922
- f.3 Dementia Praecox cases 1909-1923
- f.4 Investigation upon makeup of insanity cases 1906-1924

Box 7

- f.1 Manic depression cases 1905-1922
- f.2 Psycho-neuroses cases 1916-1922
- f.3 Various patients, 1908-1909, Dr. Amsden's original ordered sequence
- f.4 Index cards with patient names and dates, lists of patient names and hospital room locations, various loose notes
- f.5 Appointment 1926, Ever Ready Calendar pages 1934, both with appointment notes
- f.6 National Diaries 1924 & 1925 with appointment notes

See separate page for names (box 8, Box 9, f.1-2)

Box 8

Case histories

Box 9

Case histories

Series G: Correspondence with and re: Patients, 1905-1949

14 inches, Box 9, folders 3-6; Box 10-11. Arranged alphabetically by patient surname; within patient file, arranged chronologically

Letters consist mostly of those from patients to Dr. Amsden, writing during and/or after their treatment. Some are from other doctors to Dr. Amsden regarding patients, from members of patients' families, or are carbons of Dr. Amsden's letters to patients or their doctors or relatives. Seven patients account for the vast majority of the series; three of these patients wrote letters spanning from the 1910s or 1920s through the 1940s. Most letters date from the 1940s. Many include enclosures such as poetry, copies of letters sent to others, clippings and photos (latter two removed to photograph collection, filed as Amsden Papers.) Some letters from other physicians provide fairly extensive patient histories (but letters devoted exclusively to medical information can be found in the Case Histories and Other Patient Records series). Some letters are unidentified as to

date and a few as to name.

Boxes 9 – 11

Patient correspondence

Box 12

Rolled roster of patient names with notations by staff, c. 1905-22 Rolled lead-like paper c. 1899 (EKG? EEG?)

(Oversize Wagner Medical Records removed to Map Case)

Blueprints

- PWPC Building - 3rd floor - sketch for new observation room and screen
7/31/1931
- details showing lockers and observation screen in B-903
7/14/1931
- 3rd floor - details of observation: screens in observation
Room 3-906A, 8/27/1931
- 8th floor- revisions to rooms 8-938, 940, 940A, 942, 946,
6/10/1931
- 3rd floor- revisions to rooms 903, 904, 906, 6/5/1931

(First 3 blueprints by Coolidge-Shepley-Bulfinch & Abbott, Boston, Mass., last 3 by Coolidge-Shepley-Bulfinch & Abbott, N.Y.C.)